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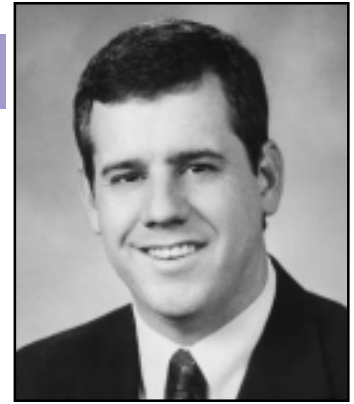
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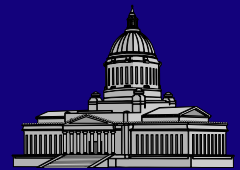
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## **20<sup>th</sup> District**

# **1998 Session Report**



*February 1998*

*Dear Friends,*

*The 60-day 1998 legislative session began on Jan. 12. Because the state operates on a two-year budget cycle, most major policy decisions are made when budgets are written in odd-numbered years. The state Legislature will meet this year to make adjustments to the state budget approved last year and to address issues demanding attention prior to next year's budget-writing session.*

*Educational improvements, transportation, new penalties for drunken driving, and avoiding Endangered Species Act listings for Washington's wild salmonids are among the issues the Legislature is considering in the current 60-day session.*

*As always, if you have questions or concerns you may contact us by calling the legislative hotline at 1-800-562-6000. You also may write or call our Olympia offices as listed above.*

*It is a privilege to work on your behalf in Olympia.*

*Sincerely,*

### **A special message to constituents**

Initiative 134, approved by voters in 1992, restricts election-year communications between incumbent state legislators and their constituents. We make an effort to acknowledge every person who contacts our Olympia offices. However, under limits established by the initiative, Reps. DeBolt and Alexander will not be able to do so in this election year unless you specifically request a response.

Legislators also are restricted in the number of informational mailings they may send during election years. So, if you want information, copies of legislation or our position on a measure before the Legislature, don't forget to request a response.

# Rep. Gary Alexander

## ***Civil service reform***

This session I will be sponsoring legislation that will reach to the cornerstone of government accountability and return us to the benefits of open competition. This bill would allow state lawmakers to remove the monopoly that public agencies currently have on the performance of certain activities and services that have regularly and historically been provided by public employees. Secondly, it would revise our antiquated civil service system and more clearly distinguish between management and non-management public employees. And thirdly, it would extend the rights of state employees to collectively bargain over wages, hours, and terms of employment.

## ***Fire prevention could save money***

I believe we could reduce the loss of public and private resources caused by wildfires each year with a more proactive common-sense approach to managing our public forests. Millions of dollars are spent each year to suppress wildfires throughout Washington during the summer and early fall. But with proper management, many of the fires we work to extinguish at enormous cost and threat to human life could be prevented entirely.

I will introduce legislation this session or next session to change our forest policy so that the state places more emphasis on fire prevention on our public lands. Through proper forest management, we can replicate many of the natural cycles in our forest habitat without having to endure the cost and risk of catastrophic wildfires.

## ***Enhancing big game populations***

Jurisdictional disputes are threatening our ability to properly manage the populations of big game wildlife species, especially our elk herds. I fear state agencies have not been proactive enough in enforcing state wildlife laws when disputes occur. This lack of authority is threatening not only our population of elk and other big game, in some cases it is threatening the safety of residents who live near popular hunting areas.

I will introduce a bill this session that directs the Department of Fish and Wildlife to better manage our big game species to enhance the populations and to provide greater security for local residents.



**Rep. Alexander will once again be working on legislation to protect our state's elk population and other big game species.**

## ***Providing a reliable funding source for school construction***

We remain committed to providing the state matching funds for all locally approved school projects so that no communities must wait while classrooms become overcrowded or deteriorate. It has become necessary for the Legislature to allocate money from the state's general fund in order to provide adequate funding for local school construction. While money from timber sales is earmarked for this purpose, revenues from timber sales have been on the decline and a more reliable source of funding is needed.

This session I will work with Rep. Mike Wensman of the 41<sup>st</sup> District to introduce a bill to allocate revenue from the state's real estate excise tax to help pay for school construction, rather than relying on impact fees which drive up the cost of housing. This measure would provide an additional \$30 million a year for schools.

# Sen. Dan Swecker

## ***Endangered Species Act – Salmon listings***

### **A brief overview**

Rarely does an issue prompt the degree of legislative scrutiny and commitment being devoted to saving Washington's wild salmon. Wild salmon are extinct in most areas of their ancestral range in Europe, the eastern United States and Canada. In our state, it is no longer an issue of who will catch the fish, but whether there will be any wild fish left to perpetuate the species.

Wild salmonid stocks in Washington have experienced long-term depletion. Some wild stocks are extinct, some are marginally reproducing, others are healthy. There are currently more than 80 stocks of salmon, steelhead and trout proposed for federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) listings in our state.

Such listings would result in establishment of recovery plans administered by the federal government. These federal plans would govern human activities affecting species survival in every region of our state. Just understanding the scope and seriousness of impending ESA listings is a momentous task.

The Washington state Legislature recently established the bipartisan, bicameral Salmon Restoration Task Force to develop a comprehensive plan for restoring Washington's dwindling salmon populations before federal involvement becomes necessary. I am co-chair of the task force, a responsibility I share with Rep. Dave Mastin of Walla Walla.

The task force's momentous assignment includes preparing the Legislature to respond to current and impending ESA listings of wild salmon. It is a tough challenge, but not an impossible one.

Unless handled properly and at the local level, ESA listing will have a dramatic effect on Washington's economy. The key is to develop a statewide response that restores the



**Sen. Swecker delivers the opening speech at a recent environmental excellence workshop.**

health of wild stocks, considers local conditions that harm salmon populations, and addresses local concerns about recovery efforts. To date, the task force has taken a common-sense, fact-based approach that includes all parties who have an economic and environmental stake in the issue.

As the only authority with control over all three components critical to salmon recovery — hatchery management, habitat protection and harvest control — it's imperative the Legislature lead efforts to address this important issue. But the Legislature alone can't solve the challenge.

Other government initiatives underway include a Natural Resource Cabinet and the Government Council on Natural Resources, both established by the governor. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) is finalizing and preparing to implement its Wild Salmonid Policy which was recently approved by the Fish and Wildlife Commission. WDFW is also working to resolve its differences with Washington's Treaty Tribes to develop a joint salmon recovery policy with them.

Other activities include negotiations between the timber industry, tribes and environmentalists to establish harvest management plans to preserve and restore habitat. The Washington Dairy

Federation is embarking on an effort to bring that industry under tighter environmental scrutiny with water quality monitoring and permitting.

When the dust settles, the Legislature's job will be to provide state money to pay for the strategies that will ensure salmon survival.

Fortunately, local involvement in restoring salmon runs is receiving needed emphasis. We can learn from Oregon's example. Oregon's response to ESA listings included no new environmental regulations. They simply agreed to enforce the laws they had. In addition, they established a \$30 million fund to pay for local habitat restoration projects. Finally, they assured federal regulators that their state will be in full compliance with the federal Clean Water Act in four years. This swift, proactive approach allowed Oregon to ward off ESA listings and prevented the federal government from taking over that state's restoration efforts. We must learn from the successful example set by our southern neighbor.

The challenge before us is daunting. Nevertheless, I'm confident the Legislature and the citizens of Washington can save the wild salmon that are essential to our heritage.

# Rep. Richard DeBolt

## ***Increasing senior tax credits***

If you're a senior citizen and a property owner in Washington, you may qualify for property tax credits. I'll be introducing a bill this session to increase the number people eligible for the exemption and create larger tax breaks for those who do qualify.

Among the key changes to the senior tax exemption policy would be a provision allowing seniors to deduct medical insurance premiums to determine income eligibility. For example, if a couple has an income of \$32,000 but they can demonstrate medical insurance costs of \$5,000, their income would be adjusted accordingly and they would qualify for the property tax exemption. This idea of deducting medical insurance costs came out of a recent meeting with Thurston County Assessor Kevin O'Sullivan.

Other provisions include:

- Raising the eligible income level from \$28,000 to \$30,000. This amount accounts for inflationary growth since the \$28,000 limit was adopted and will make more homeowners eligible for the senior property tax exemption.
- Requiring a periodic review of the exemption rate.
- Allowing the entire parcel which contains the homeowner's primary residence to be subject to the property tax exemption, rather than the current limit of one acre per every five acres.



**Rep. DeBolt has introduced legislation to expand property tax credits for seniors.**

## ***Protecting abused women***

I will reintroduce a measure I sponsored last year to crack down on individuals who violate no-contact orders. The Amy Revay Bill, named after the Rochester woman who was gunned down by her estranged husband, would make violation of a no-contact order an automatic aggravating circumstance. My bill would ensure that criminals who harm someone in violation of a court order would face stiffer penalties.

Abused women deserve better protection against these violent stalkers who show such intentional disregard for our legal system.

## ***Consumer protection is key in energy deregulation***

The unraveling of our complex energy regulations appears imminent. The purpose is to allow free competition in the marketplace, which will presumably give consumers more choices. The key to making it work, however, is education and understanding by the consumer.

I will introduce a measure that would require full disclosure of utility costs so that consumers can make informed decisions when faced with competitive choices. We cannot allow utility companies to get rich off the confusion that is created by deregulation. It's critical that we give the public the information they need to make the free-market energy system work so that it creates better choices and better rates for individual customers.

## ***Republicans reject gas tax hike***

Despite a push by the governor, the Legislature will not consider an increase in the gas tax this session. Republican leadership felt it was inappropriate to raise taxes in one area when we are expecting an \$861 million surplus in the state's general fund. As a member of the House Transportation Policy and Budget Committee, I will continue to work to ensure that existing transportation revenues are used efficiently and that the needs of rural and suburban areas such as Olympia and Centralia-Chehalis are not ignored.



# 1998 Session Report • 20th District

## Good government leads to healthy surplus

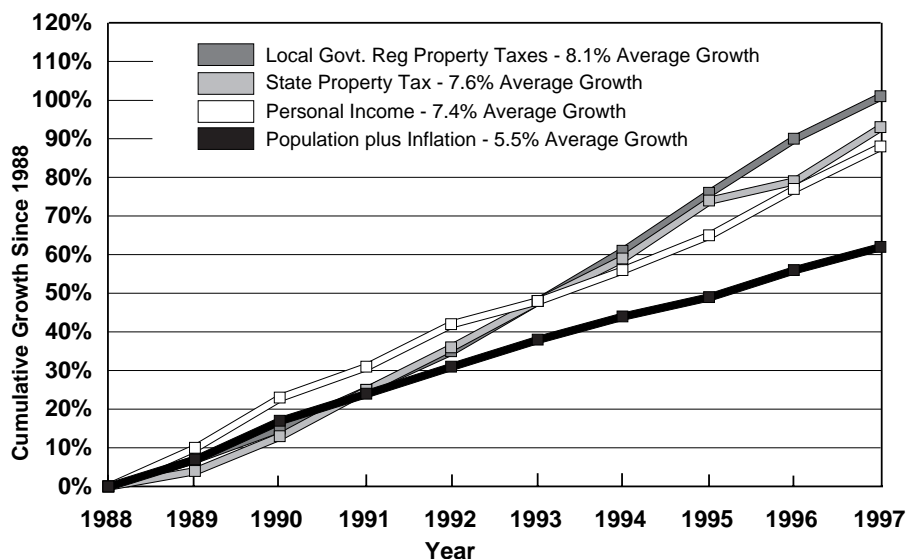
You may have heard about the \$861 million state revenue surplus. Even though \$861 million sounds like an incredible sum of money, it represents just 4 percent of the state general fund budget, and it could be spent several times over by every special interest group that would like to get its hands on it. This means the Legislature will have to prioritize and maintain its spending discipline. Our philosophy on this is simple: It's your money and it should be used in your best interest or returned to you through tax relief.

We will work to ensure that taxpayers are able to keep as much of their own money as possible. There is strong support for reducing the Motor Vehicle Excise Tax (MVET) this session and transferring a portion of this revenue to pay for a shortfall in transportation funding.

We will also continue to look at ways to cut property taxes. With the passage of Referendum 47, submitted to the voters last fall by the Republican Legislature, we've cut the state property tax levy by nearly 5 percent and put tighter limits on all future property tax increases. We remain committed to further reducing the property tax burden on homeowners.

## Property taxes continue to grow

New figures from a legislative study show that property taxes have continued to rise faster than personal income over the last 10 years. Referendum 47 will help limit future increases to the rate of inflation. The measure was vetoed by Gov. Locke last session but was approved overwhelmingly by the state's voters after the Republican-controlled Legislature placed it on the ballot. The measure takes effect this year.



## Transportation demands attention

Republican legislators are working on a transportation funding plan that would cut your Motor Vehicle Excise Tax (MVET) by about \$45 per vehicle and provide \$2.4 billion over the next six years for transportation projects around the state without raising the gas tax.

Our proposal provides the same level of funding as the governor's transportation package, but without the 11-cent-per-gallon gas tax hike that he has proposed. With an \$861 million surplus in the general fund, we should make needed transportation improvements using existing resources. Why should we raise taxes if it's not necessary?

The Republican package would transfer revenue from the MVET to pay for building new roads. It also would eliminate the portion of the MVET that is dedicated to criminal justice funding for local governments and replace that money with funding from the state's general fund.

We will continue to look for ways to find greater efficiencies in our transportation budget.

## State and Local Governments

**Regular Property Taxes  
Growth from 1988  
through 1997**

## ★ Visit Olympia ★

The state Capitol campus in Olympia is a year-round tourist destination. The Legislative Building is its centerpiece. The public is also welcome to visit the Temple of Justice where the state Supreme Court meets, the governor's mansion and several veteran's memorials situated on the 30-acre campus. We encourage everyone to take advantage of this enjoyable and educational destination located very close to our area. Public tours of the state Capitol begin each hour from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Call the Capitol Tours office at (360) 586-8687 or TDD (360) 664-3799 for more information.



**You're  
invited  
to a**

**Town Hall  
Meeting!**

Please join your 20<sup>th</sup> District legislators at one of two Town Hall meetings scheduled this month. You'll receive an update on the 1998 legislative session and have an opportunity to ask questions and share ideas with your local lawmakers. The meetings are open to the public.

### **Town Hall Meeting Schedule**

**Thursday, February 12**  
**7 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.**  
Tumwater City Hall  
555 Israel Rd. S.E.

**Thursday, February 19**  
**7 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.**  
Centralia Middle School  
901 Johnson Rd.

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